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ABSTRACT

The adult English literacy program at the Phanat Nikhom Refugee Camp has developed techniques for actively engaging the sometimes reluctant students in the skill development process leading to literacy. A literacy warm-up chart used daily for five minutes develops the prereading skills of sequencing and left-to-right eye coordination; a variety of mathematical, calendar, and alphabet concepts; and self-confidence. An expansion game designed for use with the warm-up chart has students read words drawn from a box, match them with flash cards, and insert the flash cards in the appropriate pockets in a duplicate warm-up chart. Individualization by the Language Experience Approach involves creative artistic and composition activities by students, dictation, illustration, and reading of stories on a given topic. A variation on this technique requires the participation of more than one student at a time. Activities for teaching letter sounds include a racing game, a team game to identify words beginning with a particular letter, and a dart game that has several letter identification and dart throwing variations. The dart game can be adapted for other topics such as food, clothing, occupations, colors, time, places, and calendar. (MSE)

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Getting Them on Their Literate Feet

Yvonne Safwat and Team
Phanat Nikhom Refugee Camp

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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I had been interested in ESL literacy before becoming an ESL supervisor at the Phanat Nikhom Refugee Camp. Teaching in a San Francisco community college, I saw that many lower-level students were overwhelmed by the written word, and some dropped out of classes altogether because they couldn't read. I became convinced that, if possible, refugees should get a firm foundation in literacy skills before arriving in the U.S. so that they would be better able to profit from the instruction available to them.

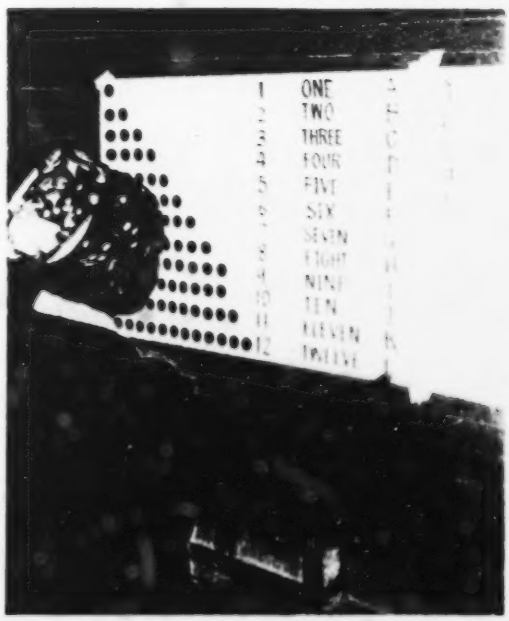
Now, as a supervisor of eight ESL instructors in the Overseas Refugee Training Program, I have been able to work with others in providing refugees with that foundation. Our team has been unanimous in its commitment to English language literacy. We have also concluded that reading and writing instruction does not have to mean rows of seated, silent students bending over sheets of paper at individual desks. By sharing ideas with one another and by borrowing and adapting other people's ideas, our A-level team has developed a literacy program that actively engages the students. The following are highlights of three basic procedures we use to launch our non-literate refugee students towards literacy.

Daily Warm-Up Literacy Chart

We learned about the literacy chart from ESL instructors Nina Jaico and Ligaya Escobar, who were visiting from the Philippine Refugee Processing Center. We expanded their original chart and developed our own way of using it as a five-minute daily warm-up. Nina and Ligaya had stressed that by using the chart, students would develop the pre-reading skills of sequencing and left-to-right eye coordination. We have found that students also gain basic mathematical, calendar, and alphabet concepts, as well as confidence in their ability to learn. (See Figure 1.)

Procedure:

Teachers usually use the chart at the beginning of the class period so that students will feel secure in knowing what will be expected of them for the first few minutes of class. The teacher introduces and models the material in columns as the students make gradual, daily progress across the chart. The rate at which the new material is introduced can be adjusted to the speed at which students learn. In order to gauge students' readiness for the new columns, the leftmost material is reviewed each day before going on to anything new. In other words, the students start from the beginning each day, progressing across the columns until they reach the new material, moving from the known to the unknown. This repetition and review promotes mastery and builds confidence. The slower students are more ready to take risks because of the daily repetition,



Hmong student at warm-up chart.

Photo by Don Ranard.

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Figure 1: *The daily warm-up literacy chart used at Phanat Nikhom is six feet long and two feet high. The names of colors are printed in the colors they represent. Note that only half the alphabet appears on this chart. The rest of the letters are added to the chart when students have covered the letters here.*

•	1	ONE	a	1st	SUNDAY	January	red	Cents	Times	Years	bills
••	2	TWO	b	2nd	MONDAY	February	yellow	1	1:00	1940	$1.00
•••	3	THREE	c	3rd	TUESDAY	March	blue	penny	1:30	1945	$5.00
••••	4	FOUR	d	4th	WEDNESDAY	April	green	2¢	2:00	1950	$10.00
•••••	5	FIVE	e	5th	THURSDAY	May	orange	3¢	2:30	1955	$20.00
••••••	6	SIX	f	6th	FRIDAY	June	purple	4¢	3:00	1960	
•••••••	7	SEVEN	g	7th	SATURDAY	July	black	5¢	4:40	1965	$50.00
••••••••	8	EIGHT	h	8th		August	brown			1970	
•••••••••	9	NINE	i	9th		September	white			1975	$100.00
••••••••••	10	TEN	j	10th		October					
•••••••••••	11	ELEVEN	k	11th		November					
••••••••••••	12	TWELVE	l	12th		December		10¢			

and the faster students can become the tutors while the teacher is allowed to "drop out."

The way in which we use the chart determines its success. The students stand facing the chart. The teacher calls on one student who begins counting, touching each dot while saying the numbers. This student may be interrupted at any time (even in the middle of a line of dots) by the teacher's random, rapid-fire calling on another student. This requires students to be attentive and "on their toes," and it gives the activity the liveliness of a game. Before we began using this procedure, students would lose interest after their turn was over.

Besides teaching what is clearly represented on the chart, teachers use it to give students practice with other skills. For example, after students practice reading the written numbers, the teacher covers the numerals (1, 2, 3, 4) with a strip of paper and calls upon a student to point to the various spelled-out numbers as sightwords (ten, one, twelve, etc.). After the concept of ordinal numbers has been learned, the teacher asks students to name the first letter in the alphabet, the tenth letter, etc. Later they can name the first day of the week or the last month of the year. Many WH questions can be practiced with the chart: What day comes before Thursday? Which number starts with the /s/ sound?

We know that we are on the right track because we see students working with the chart during their breaks. "After one month my students could remember the number sightwords and the small letters of the alphabet," says "Jiab," one of the instructors. "After six weeks they could remember ordinal numbers, and after seven weeks they could remember sightwords for colors."

Expansion Game for Warm-up Chart (by "Kim")

This activity can supplement the use of the daily warm-up chart.

Materials:

- 2 small boxes
- 2 sets of flashcards showing letters, numbers, colors, months, and days
- 2 sets of small slips of paper with sight words for the items on the flashcards
- 2 charts which display the same information as the warm-up charts, but also have a built-in pocket for each item on the chart. We call these pocket charts.

Procedure:

1. Divide class into two teams.
2. Put the little boxes of sight words written on slips of paper in front of each team.
3. Place all the flash cards on other tables against the wall holding the pocket charts.
4. Taking turns, students from each team take slips from boxes and read the sightwords out loud. Teacher tallies correct readings.
5. After reading a sightword, a student finds the matching flashcard and places it in the appropriate pocket of the pocket chart.

6. The team which places all the flashcards in proper order in the pocket chart wins. If both teams finish at the same time, the winner is determined by the tally of correct readings.

LEA

After establishing the daily use of the literacy chart, we instituted the use of individualized Language Experience Approach (LEA) after each appropriate unit. The teachers on our team were instructed in ways of presenting the method to their students. Then I demonstrated individualized LEA in each class, and later observed each team member using the method. The teachers have used this method after completing units on health, shopping, nationality, occupations, and housing.

Procedure for Individualized LEA (by "Jiab")

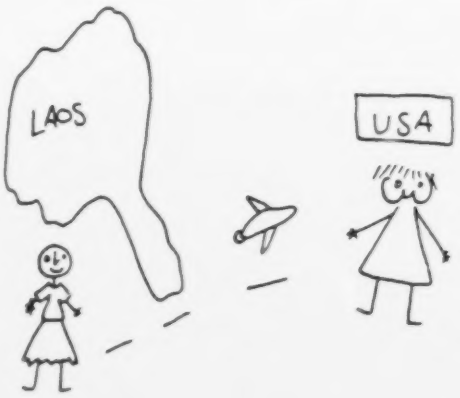
1. The teacher models by drawing a picture and telling a story. The teacher then writes the story. Then the pictures are covered or erased.
2. Students draw their own pictures relating to the given topic. The teacher gives students plenty of time to complete pictures. When a student finishes, the teacher points to the picture and says, "Tell me."
3. The teacher writes whatever the student utters on a piece of lined paper.
4. The teacher reads the completed story to, or with, the student.
5. The student copies the teacher's transcription onto a separate paper.
6. The student reads the story to the teacher. If the student can't remember a word, the teacher cues by pointing to parts of the picture.
7. Students work in pairs and then as a class group, reading their own and others' stories aloud.
8. Students take their stories home for further reading and the teacher keeps a record of individual students' writings by keeping the original transcriptions.

We consider this a "pure" form of LEA, because the students draw pictures that come from their own experience and knowledge and use words that are their own. We write only what the student utters, being careful not to impose our own form or vocabulary. If a student draws a picture representing a word he or she can't produce in English, we give the word if requested, but do not write it in the LEA story because it has not yet been acquired by the student. Should we be worried about good grammar? Most teachers are not afraid that students will permanently acquire incorrect forms when allowing natural oral communication in the class. Similarly, we should not assume that students will fossilize incorrect forms when writing naturally.

Individualized LEA is an excellent formative testing technique for evaluating how much language students have acquired during the aural/oral parts of a lesson. As can be seen in the student samples (see Figure 2), incorrect structures due to incomplete learning of a grammatical point or to over-generalizations of previously learned structures, can easily be recognized. Teachers can later focus on forms and vocabulary that have not been learned. As greater language proficiency is reached, the form of the dictated stories will evolve. An individual's progress can be recorded simply by keeping copies of the stories.

We are always amazed to hear the students read their stories exactly as written. They can do so

Figure 2: *In the individualized language experience approach, each student first draws a story and then dictates the language to accompany it.*



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because they generally can remember what they dictate. If they happen to forget a word they previously dictated, the teacher can cue them by pointing to parts of the picture. Since the class stories are written on the same topics, "cross reading" between students is possible; everyone is using similar vocabulary. Reading another person's story involves more than simple memorization of a dictation. This activity brings the student into the realm of "real reading," through recognizing similar word shapes in new arrangements.

Teachers have responded enthusiastically to the use of LEA. "People enjoy this work because they can imagine their story and write it," "Jiab" says. "They love to use crayons. They feel happy and free." "Wat" adds, "The picturing [in LEA] is an important part of the method because it stimulates natural language and reinforces students' memories. In addition, LEA contains the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing."

"A" has also found LEA useful with her low-level students. "My Hmong students can describe their story in a sentence or phrase, although sometimes their grammar isn't correct. My Lao students often describe their stories with just words, not sentences, but they have large vocabularies."

LEA doesn't work equally well with all students, "Wat" adds. "The method doesn't work well with the older students who have a short memory and can't remember what they have just dictated." And "Jum" offers this cautionary note: "We must give them enough time to work on LEA. We must not rush them. We spend at least one period, an hour and a half, for LEA."

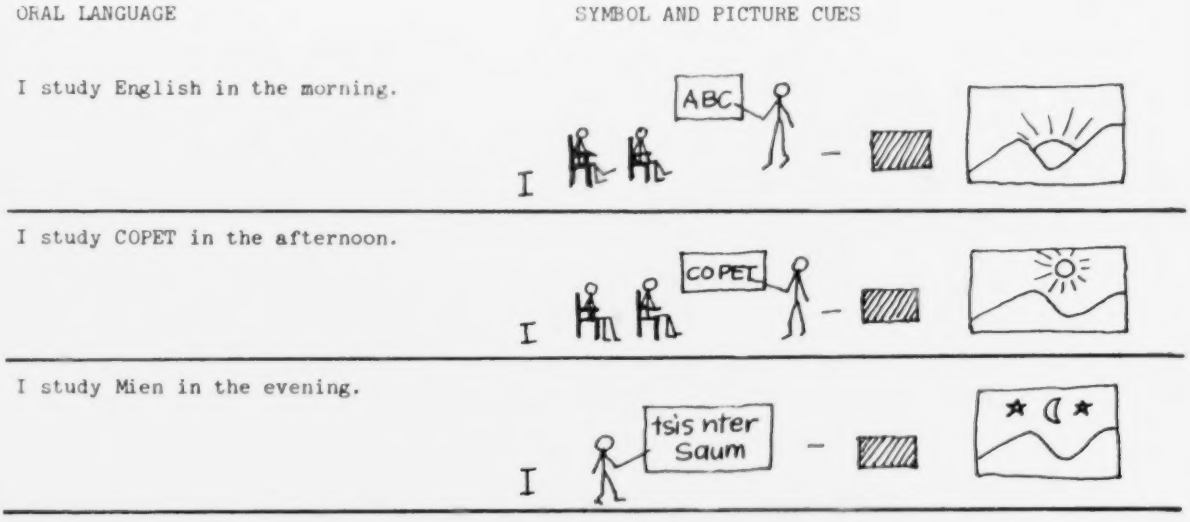
A Variation of Group LEA (by "Apple")

At first it was difficult adapting the language experience approach to A-level students, but I tried it with a Mien class, and it worked wonderfully. This has inspired me to use it at the end of each possible unit. There are still some problem areas, though. Because individualized LEA is time-consuming and demands one-on-one attention to students, teachers need to find ways to keep all the students attentive throughout. The following variation of LEA was devised in order to maximize group participation.

Procedure:

1. To elicit the story from a picture or topic introduced by the teacher, pairs of students ask and answer questions as the teacher coaches them from the front of the room.
2. The teacher asks a third student to answer questions relating to the paired dialogue and writes those answers on the board, using symbols, picture cues, and some sight words.
3. The teacher reads each "hieroglyphic" sentence with the class after writing it on the board. After practicing a new sentence, the class reviews the preceding sentences.
4. After the whole story is written with symbols, pictures, and sightwords on the board, the class reads it chorally and individually (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: *In the group LEA, the entire class learns to read and write a story generated by classmates. As the story is given orally by students, the teacher transcribes it onto the board, using symbols, pictures, and sightwords.*



5. The teacher replaces the first symbol found in the story with a word. The symbol for "the," for example, is a square with diagonal lines. (See Figure 3.) The teacher asks the class if they can find the same word elsewhere in the story.
6. Gradually, all of the symbols and pictures are replaced with written words. The teacher may ask the class to spell out words that are repeated such as *the*.
7. The class reads the story with words in the place of symbols and pictures.
8. One follow-up activity is for students to copy the story in their notebooks. The teacher may need to remind them about mechanics, such as leaving spaces betwen words. Then the teacher gives scrambled sentence strips of the story to pairs of students and they put the strips in order.

Sound/Symbol Activities

After the team was accustomed to using the literacy chart and the language experience approach, (in addition to visual discrimination and handwriting exercises), we ventured into sound/symbol activities. We agreed on a sequence of introducing consonant sounds based on those most frequently occurring in our students' names. We introduce a new consonant sound daily and a vowel sound weekly, using a procedure taught to us by veteran reading teacher Melinda Ciok.

Teaching Letter Sounds

1. Tape a card with a capital and a small letter onto the board in front of the class. (Example: Bb)
2. Tape "key pictures" onto the board. (Ball, boy, bike) Use pictures of things that are known by the students.
3. Have students identify English names of the key pictures.
4. Tape up a word card and read the word for each picture. Point to the initial sound /b/ in each word and have students "read" the words. Say the sound of the letter before you say each word but don't distort the sound.
5. Give each student a small "Bb" card. Say a series of words – perhaps ones that are known to the students. Students hold up the "Bb" cards if a word begins with /b/ sound. After learning other sounds, students can hold two letters and contrast the two sounds in the same manner.

Letter/Sound Racing Game (by "Long")

This game was designed to get my Hmong students on their feet while practicing initial consonant sounds.

Materials:
- Letter cards with capital and small letters

Procedure:
1. Tape letter cards onto the board.
2. Divide the class into two groups, and have them line up facing the board.
3. Call out the sound of a letter and have a student from each team run to grab the correct letter card from the board.
4. A point is awarded to the team that gets the correct card first.
5. When the time is up, the team with the most points win.

What words start with the sound ____?
(by Malcolm)

Materials:
- A watch with a second hand; a bell.

Procedure:
1. The students are divided into two teams.
2. Tell the class that each team will be given 30 seconds to call out words that start with a particular letter, such as "P" or "B."
3. Each word called out by the team earns a point before the time expires. The team with the most points wins.

Literacy Dart Game (by "Wat")

This dart game can be used as a relaxing and enjoyable review of letter sounds. Other topics that can be practiced with the dart board game are food, clothing, occupation, colors, time, places, and calendar.

Materials:
- Paper dart board backed with foam (See Figure 4.)
- Darts

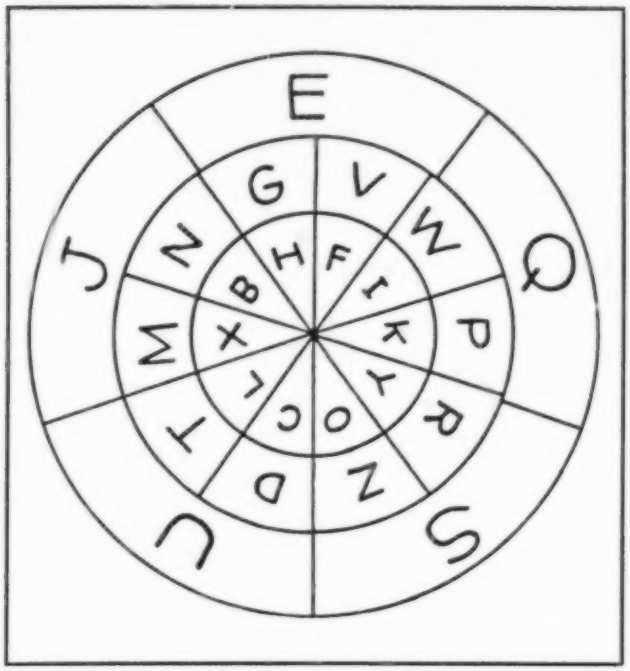
Procedure:
1. For a warm-up activity, the teacher points to various letters on the dart board, and the students call out the names and/or sounds of the letters.
2. After the class is divided into two teams, the teacher calls out a consonant sound (such as

/b/). One member of each team takes turns throwing a dart at letter "B" on the dart board.

3. Letters in the innermost circle are worth three points; in the second circle, two points; and those in the outer circle are worth only one. The first team to reach 20 points (or some other total) is the winner.

The literacy dart game can be varied for different purposes. One way to keep all participants attentive is to have Team A throw the dart and Team B call the letter sound. To make the game less teacher-centered, students can state which letter they are aiming for before throwing the dart.

Figure 4



Yvonne Safwat (front, center) is an ESL supervisor at the Phanat Nikhom Refugee Camp. Her previous experience includes two years with the Peace Corps as a teacher trainer in Lesotho, Africa. For three years, she taught ESL to refugees in San Francisco at the Alemany Community College Center. Safwat has been a presenter at state and international TESOL conventions. She holds an MA in ESL from San Francisco State University.

The A-level teachers who helped write this article are, front row, left to right: ***Phoungphelh "Jiab" Dechsingha, Ariya "Kim" Melvin, Kulrudee "A" Ratsameeuijitpaisarn, Achara "Jum" Chattamanokul;*** *back row:* ***Suwat "Wat" Supapondee, Suwatn "Apple" Prongchitt, Sombat "Long" Chaiyasert,*** *and* ***Malcolm Watkins.***